

TEIRESIAS

When in an argument, a clever man
Is given a good opening, it's not great feat
To speak well. Your tongue is glib, and makes noises
That sound like sense, and yet their sense's unsound.
And a strongheaded man who can speak plausibly
Is a danger to the state, if he has no judgment.
This god, yes, this new god you are making fun of,
I can't begin to say how great he'll prove
Throughout Greece.

Young man, there are two principles
Supreme in human order: the first is Demeter,
The Mother Earth; by whatever name you call her
She stands for Bread, and feeds our mortal mouths
With solid food.

And now, here comes the other,
The son of God born to the virgin,
Bringing the counter-gift to bread: wine.
He brought release from the sorrows of flesh;
When replete with blood of grape, sleep comes,
And the oblivion of each day's stale burden,
And there is no other balm for the weariness
Of living.

His blood, a god's blood,
Is poured to the other gods in sacrifice,
And in his name mankind is blessed.

And this god is also a prophet. His
Ecstasy and bacchic mania have prophecy in it.

When too much god descends into one body
It overshoots time, and the maddened voice
Foretells the future. And he has a share
In the domain of Ares, the God of War.
A whole army in perfect order, with arms
And banners, may break in sudden panic
Before a single spear clangs. This kind
Of madness also comes from Dionysus.
And I predict you'll see this god in Delphi
With pine-torches, dancing on the holy rocks,
Sharing Parnassus' twin mountain peaks
With Apollo himself, shaking and hurling
His drunken bacchic rod, great throughout
Greece. No, listen to me, Pentheus.

Be not so sure
That force and order rule all-powerful
Over humanity. And be not governed
By one single certainty. That thought is sick,
Don't think it's wisdom. There is too much
We do not know. And a new god may well be
A very old law, though yet unwritten
And unnamed. Accept this deity in your state;
Submit to his mysteries; pour your libation
To him – come, wreath your head.

As for the women,
It is not up to Dionysus to force them
To be chaste in love. It should be in their natures.
Kindly consider that. Even in the most
Abandoned figures of the Bacchic dance,

The really pure in heart won't be corrupted.

And then, you see, you are pleased, when
The whole town throngs to the palace gates, and
The people magnify the name of Pentheus: the god
Too, would, I think, delight in receiving honors.
So myself, and Kadmus – whom you find so funny –
Decked in our ivy shoots, are going to dance –
An ancient pair perhaps, yet dance we must.
And I will not be talked into god-fighting,
No, not by anything you say. Your mind
Thrashes about in fever, most painfully,
And it is not a drug would bring relief to it.